



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

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### NINE NEW IRRIGATION DRAINAGE STUDIES ANNOUNCED BY INTERIOR DEPARTMENT

Secretary of the Interior Don Hodel today announced the Department will begin on-site studies in seven states to determine if current or potential water quality problems related to irrigation drainage exist.

"The Department's irrigation drainage initiative was organized because of problems discovered at the Kesterson National Wildlife Refuge in California," Hodel said. "We intend to identify and respond to any present or potential irrigation drainage contamination problem associated with Interior's irrigation projects, national wildlife refuges, or other migratory bird or endangered species management areas that receive water from Department-funded projects."

"We are placing very high priority on the identification and elimination of any threat that may be posed to people or wildlife from irrigation drainage," Hodel said. "If we do find problems, we also intend to find solutions that will maintain the agricultural viability of these projects while protecting the quality of our Nation's surface and ground waters."

The areas selected for study are: the Tulare Lake and Salton Sea areas in California, the Lower Colorado-Gila River Valley area in California and Arizona, the Stillwater Wildlife Management area in Nevada, the Middle Green River Basin area in Utah, the Sun River and Milk River Reclamation Projects in Montana, the Kendrick Reclamation Project in Wyoming, and the Lower Rio Grande-Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge area in Texas.

"These nine areas are the highest priorities among 19 areas in the West that a Departmental task group had selected for further investigation earlier this year," Jonathan Deason, Irrigation Drainage Coordinator for the Department, said. "Although no evidence of toxic effects to humans, fish or wildlife has been identified at any of the nine sites, Departmental reviews of existing environmental quality studies have indicated the need for further information."

Field teams of U.S. Geological Survey, Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Reclamation representatives have been formed at each of the nine sites to conduct the studies. Each field team will work closely with appropriate state and local government agencies and other federal agencies.

During the study process, the field teams will collect a series of water, sediment, plant and animal samples taken at a variety of locations at each site. Each sample will be subjected to comprehensive laboratory testing to determine existing levels of potentially toxic contaminants. The Department will issue a written final report for each study area. Interior plans to complete all of the studies in 1987, except for the Stillwater and Salton Sea studies, which will be completed in 1988.

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